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ABSTRACT

During the summer of 1984, 30 speech communication professors and their spouses visited Shanghai, Beijing, Moscow, and Leningrad, spending three or four days in each city. In each of the four communist cities, they met with professors and administrators for long briefings and discussions about communication. One of the first things the Americans noticed was the striking contrast between the openness of the Chinese and the restraint of the Russians. The Russians readily answered American questions, but politely refused to ask any. The visitors concluded that the reasons for the Russians' cold reception was due to the ease with which they could be identified as Americans (by clothing and nametags), especially since United States-Soviet relations were at that time at very low ebb. In China, the group visited a radio station, toured the facilities of the Foreign Language Institute, and spent two and one-half hours in conversation with Li Shou-pao of the Chinese People's Friendship Association. They discovered that (1) the Chinese used communication media effectively to disseminate government policy, (2) most cultural and entertainment programing was designed to convey social or political messages, (3) daily foreign language lessons by radio were helping many Chinese learn foreign languages, and (4) Chinese farmers, newly affluent because of changed economic policies, had television sets in their homes. (The paper includes Li's answers to questions.) (HOD)

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VISIT TO CHINA AND THE USSR

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ABSTRACT: VISIT TO CHINA AND THE USSR

Speech Communication Association members met with counterparts in Shanghai, Beijing, Moscow and Leningrad in the summer 1984. They discovered a striking contract between the openness of the Chinese and the restraint of the Russian professors. The Russians would readily answer American questions but politely refused to ask any. The Chinese are using communication media effectively to disseminate government policy. Even most cultural and entertainment programming is designed to convey social or political messages. Daily foreign language lessons by radio are helping many Chinese learn foreign languages including English. Chinese farmers newly affluent because of changed economic policies, have television sets in their homes on the communes.

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VISIT TO CHINA AND THE USSR

During the summer of 1984, thirty speech communication professors and spouses visited Shanghai, Beijing, Moscow, and Leningrad, spending three or four days in each city and concluding their trip with a one-day layover in Helsinki. In each of the four communist cities, they met with professors and administrators for long briefings and discussions on communication. About four hours of these conversations were tape recorded, and this paper draws heavily on those recordings.

One of the first things the Americans noticed was the striking contrast between the openness of the Chinese and the restraint of the Russians. The Chinese expressed a frank interest in what is going on in other countries and a willingness to exchange ideas. They recognize, and readily admit, that the Cultural Revolution set back intellectual pursuits in China by more than thirty years, and they are anxious to catch up.

The visit with the Soviets revealed a quite different attitude. In both the Moscow and Leningrad briefings, Soviet professors were very willing to tell about their system of education, to discuss their teaching of communication, and to answer our questions. But—even though in each city our tour leader, J. Jeffery Auer,[1] offered the opportunity—the Russians politely and firmly refused to ask us any questions about the American system. This mystifying behavior on the part of the Soviet educators was consistent with the reactions of the people on the streets of Russia, where even the most outgoing Americans were unable to get anyone to respond openly. This reserve was unnerving after our experience in China, where, if an American smiled or spoke, dozens of people would gather to stare and respond with smiles and nods, even if they didn't understand English. And those who did speak English were anxious to talk with Americans. On the crowded sidewalks and streets of Shanghai and Beijing, people would walk directly up to us, leaning close to read the Chinese writing on the nametags hanging around our necks. In Moscow and Leningrad, there would be (at most) furtive

glances in passing, followed by whispering when the passersby felt they were no longer being observed.

Although the Russians were in general reluctant to interact with us, there were two notable exceptions. One instance occurred in Moscow. During intermission at a folkdance performance, a newsman approached two of us, seeking our opinion of the program for an article he was writing. Commenting that there is no conflict in art, he seemed relatively relaxed, perhaps confident that his professional needs legitimized his contact with us. The other deviation from standard conduct occurred in the Hermitage. The rooms in this magnificent, ornate palace were supervised by older women, most of them imperious and uncommunicative. But one regal, sedate old lady in her eighties welcomed us in flawless English to "her" room—as if to her own home. Under her gracious guidance, the art—and even the furniture—took on an added brilliance. However, these were the only direct verbal interchanges between the Americans and the Soviets, other than with tour guides and hotel personnel in the line of duty.

As visitors, we wondered about the reasons for the Russians' cold reception. Several of us concluded that the ease with which we could be identified as Americans (by clothing and nametags) may have contributed to the lack of cordiality. Since U.S.-Soviet relations were at that time at very low ebb, the U.S.S.R. may have had a policy against open discussions with Westerners. Such a policy, coupled with some reticence about talking to strangers, may well have prevented the kind of response we received in both of the Chinese cities.

In China, in addition to visiting a radio station, touring the facilities of the Foreign Language Institute, and having a profitable discussion with the faculties of two institutions of higher learning, the group spent about two and one-half hours in conversation with Mr. Li Shou-pao of the Chinese People's Friendship Association in Shanghai. Mr. Li, having been educated in Chicago and having served on many

international commissions, spoke very good English, understood Americans very well, and proved to be an articulate and interesting person with a great sense of humor.

Let me warn listeners, however, that Mr. Li's answers to the questions that follow reflect what Fox Butterfield--in his 1982 book China: Alive in the Bitter Sea--refers to as the "official China, . . . the one we most often read about in accounts by Western visitors who have spent a few weeks there."[2] Mr Li, whom I quote extensively in the rest of this paper, was an effective representative of the established power structure in a controlled state. Although there are probably calculated gaps in the picture he presented, his statements appear to be credible and they are certainly enlightening.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Li told the group that in contrast to Americans, who expect a direct answer to each question, the Chinese like to give background explaining their point of view before finally answering the question. They prefer to receive all questions at once--to get the whole picture--before answering the first question. He pointed out, that there are times, however, such as in telephone conversations, when answers are usually fairly direct.

The recorded questions and answers move from lighter topics, such as entertainment, to the more complex--birth control, promotional techniques used by the goverment, policies regarding the aged, social practices among the men, and barriers to comunication. This progress is apparent in the selected questions and answers which follow.

Q: Would I be likely to see dramatic productions--such as opera--on TV?

A: The Chinese people like to dramatize or to add music to some communication. . . . If you stay in China longer you'll find we have developed many kinds of local operas, not exactly in the sense of opera in the West, you see. It is subtle, with very

clear language, very simple music. You will be able to understand what she is singing, and this is for entertainment and for education. . . . There are different stories . . . educational stories. "The Red Chamber Dream"--its a beautiful performance of modern themes, very contemporary themes. And the people like that--local operas.

Q: Let's say that the government comes out with a policy--say a policy on birth control. What would be the communicative media and the methods used to inform and persuade the people to follow the policy?

A: Well, the state has a fixed policy and then starts the education. The national magazines, newspapers, broadcasters will tell you the importance of practicing birth control and family planning. And then there will be exhibitions of diagrams, etc. There will be lectures by the doctors how to practice birth control. Sometimes the leader of the city or the women's federation leader (the women's federation is particularly responsible for promoting family planning and birth control, etc.). And then, way down to the street committee--the district is divided by streets. The street committee is not an administrative arm of the government; the street committee is organized by the people themselves--the lanes and the apartments together. You see, we have five people, and you serve on the committee. Mostly voluntary. You don't receive any pay. Many of them are retired people on the street committee. They are responsible for family planning in the streets of their jurisdiction. So, the committee will try to go in to the family and tell you what you are to do. And if instead of having one child you have two, that would create a problem, you see.

This is a very important problem. If we would be able to control our population that would be very important.

Q: If a couple were to want more children, how would you go about persuading that couple not to have more children?

A: Now, this problem exists now in the countryside. I don't find any problem in

the city. Young people do not want more than one child. They feel that it is a burden to have two children. One is enough. Of course, one child has the problem of being a spoiled child. But still not a big problem. But in the coutryside many familes want more children. They are now financially much better, and they want labor.

Now we have a plan. If they have one child they are given some special privileges financially, but if you have two children you wouldn't enjoy that financial subsidy, etc. So that is really encouraging.

Q: Is it also that in the countryside the parents when they grow older want children to take care of them?

A: I think there is a tendency for people when they grow older--they want children to take care of them. But in the village, countryside, the families mostly live together. Even if they have one child they live together with the younger generation. Now in the cities there are still families where the children and their parents live together, but the tendency is to separate.

Q: What are the alternatives? Do you have nursing homes?

A: We have nursing homes, but even if <the elderly> live alone they will be taken care of by the children. Now, though, some of them are living together with the younger generation.

Q: You said that there would be articles in magazines as part of this campaign. These are government publications? private magazines?

A: The women's federation publishes a lot of them.

Q: But they would find it politic to follow the policy and give space to it?

A: Well, the policy is to have one family--one child. Very simple.

<Note: In this last answer there was perhaps a lot more revealed than the words actually say. "The policy is to have one family--one child. Very simple." We Americans had decided that our objective was person-to-person interaction, not political dis-

cussion. Yet there seemed to be a natural progression, carrying social and educational concerns to the fringes of political policy. Of course, this is not really surprising; an understanding of communication patterns inevitably involves political background.>

Q: If the financial incentive is no longer as appealing to the people in the countryside, since their incomes have improved, is there peer pressure? Is it embarrassing to have larger families? Do they feel ostracized for having more than one <child>?

A: You certainly wouldn't be very popular if you have more than one child, in the cities particularly. In the countryside maybe it is different. But in Shanghai if a young couple decides, we will have two children—people wouldn't think it is so good.

Q. One of the things that impressed me in my reading for the trip was the emphasis on the group, where in the U.S. we put a lot of emphasis on individual achievement. Do you think your move toward public speaking and putting an individual up front is something that is going to lead to a basic change in your culture as far as the emphasis on the group?

A: Informal, personal discourse still covers an important part of our speech communication. That's tradition, and it continues like that. That is one of our characteristics. Now, in the countryside there is an expression Chinese say—"going up to the teahouse." Early in the morning, I think summertime five or five-thirty, wintertime seven, the farmer will go to the center, the township, where there are very small teahouses. They will sit down together and have tea just for informal chatting, personal talks, for exchange of information, for making new acquaintences, for meeting old friends, for solving problems. They just sit down together and have a simple tea. This is their way.

Also in the cities—in Canton in particular—in the cities they have many kinds of teahouses serving the workers, not just the intellectuals. The workers go there and

spend an hour before they go to the office, or after the office they spend a few hours in the evening, just to meet people together. This sort of thing still goes on.

Now, we have developed a thing callled "heart-to-heart talk." We don't do that in a group. You and I might do that together. Let's have a personal, two-person talk. We call it a heart-to-heart talk. This is a very important means of speech communication still in China.

We also have another very popular way to meet—over dinner, have a meal together, or have tea at home. After tea or after a meal, or after a little wine or liquor, we have a little talk.

Q: Would most of the people at the early morning teahouse be men? Would there be women there?

A: Mostly male. That's tradition. But now, particularly in Canton, now women are welcome, but few women go there. It is the men who are interested in those teahouse chattings, etc. In Canton you find some women in the teahouses, but in the counryside very few women go there. Of course women are welcome. They don't prohibit them.

Q: Do they have their own teahouses?

A: There is a development <in that direction> but the teahouses were developed in feudal times, and at that time women were not allowed to go into those places where men met. Sometimes in the modern teahouses you find more women than men. I mean in Shanghai. Today a woman might invite a man to go there, and give him some blame for something he has done. That's possible. But that's only in the cities.

Although it doesn't happen now in China, fifty years ago the woman woudn't dare to speak freely to the men, in a men's gathering. That is all still true in some of the countryside, such as Manchuria. My son was--during the Cultural Revolution he was sent down to near the Russian border, in those far away villages, and he had to stay in

the villages. He told me that the women in those villages do not have an equal position as the men. The women wouldn't dare to say much in front of men. That is still happening, but only in remote places. In the cities, women speak much more than men sometimes.

<Note: Many social and political changes are apparent in the lifestyle of both the men and the women. A comparative glance at the pictures in the March, 1980, and the July, 1983, issues of National Geographic readily reveals the changes in clothing and lifestyle that have taken place in only three years.

Also, much of the briefing material distributed to the tour group just prior to the trip proved to be out of date by the time we arrived in Shanghai. The tour guide pointed out that changes are occurring too rapidly for the tour companies to keep their materials current.>

Q: Are age or education barriers to communication?

A: <Age?> Not necessarily so. In families, certainly not. Older people and younger people come together and discuss freely, . . . <but> in discussion meetings . . . the young people would say, "Oh, Mr. Li, you are the senior. You please speak first." That's all right. That's for courtesy.

<Education> can be a barrier. People who are well educated and those who are not educated--it is very hard to communicate, . . . <but> we teach people to be equals. That's important. Formerly masters seemed to be superior to their servants. Now, this can't happen. Now the workers are more important than the boss. They are the masters of the country. The farmers, too. In the past, I mean before 1949, workers and the common people were looked down. That certainly changes a great deal.

Another barrier we are trying to take care of now, is what we call the "scientific illiterates." You don't understand what is the computer science . . . including myself.

Oh, I'm going to an evening computer class to learn something about computer science, because otherwise I wouldn't be able to talk with my younger son who is especially studying computer science. He says, "You don't know about such things." And we are facing . . .the world technological revolution that is going on. New sciences. Now, if we won't be able to follow--catch up with--the new sciences, we are still going to be backward. We have to catch up. Then we need the education of the new sciences very much. . . . One of the weaknesses of our program in the last thirty years is that education was not given enough priority. So now we are changing. People are going to international conferences. . . .

In the last few years . . . we had put too much investment into heavy industry, not enough into development of light industry for the development of the city and raising the living standard of the people. Now we are changing this. . . . A larger portion of the national budget should be in education.

Q: Do you see an increase in the number of those students who will be able to go to the U.S. or other countries to study?

A: Everywhere you go there are people who would like to go to the United States or other countries to study. But, we won't be able to let all of them go. You wouldn't want to take so many. Now we already have 50,000 in the United States . . . paid by the state. <But> the limit is on your side. You wouldn't want <more than a limited number> to come in.

Q: So more of your students go to the United States than to other countries?

A: First, America. Second, Japan. Then Germany. One of the handicaps for the students that we have sent in the last few years is that their English is not good enough. So, it created a problem. They couldn't understand what is going on. Now we are trying to make it more strict. If you want to go to the United States you must pass an examination so that you will be able to do well in the classes. A number of them

actually didn't get very much, because they didn't know what the teacher was talking about.

Q: If we had a student who was going to study in China, what suggestions would you make in his orientation so that he or she could become more assimilated into Chinese culture?

A: Mix with the Chinese people. They have some difficulty. Sometimes an American teaching in the university will not have an opportunity to go to Chinese homes, and they will mix only with their colleagues from America, or Australia, or England, etc. But we have one person assigned to try to help this situation. He tries to encourage our teachers and students to have more contact with American teachers, so they not only teach but they become friends of the students and other Chinese people.

Q: Has the Cultural Revolution had an effect on how the communication media are viewed or how they are used now in contemporary China?

A: Sure . . . the Cultural Revolution has had an effect on all sides of Chinese life--political, ecconomic, social, etc. We call that "extreme left influences." We are working very energetically to get rid of the extreme left influences. I wouldn't dare to say that all those influences <u>have</u> been gotten rid of. But <during> these years the new policies have been implemented very successfully, and the so-called Cultural Revolution practices we are discarding.

Now, in communication one thing we have done very successfully and very thoroughly. . . . You should have been here during <the Cultural Revolution> days. All the walls on the streets were covered with big posters, or painted with black ink or asphalt, and terrible the city looks. All kinds of slogans. Not speech, written communication. And you find on the streets people "preaching" what they want you to accept. And the radio, newspapers, and television--all doing those same kind<s> of things.

Those we have completely gotten rid of. At that time, they go by mass campaign. The main way of communication was by mass campaign. Everything by mass.

Summary and Conclusions

Mr. Li's interview took place early in the trip. After spending eight more days in China and having since examined trip diary notes and having reviewed the two and one- half hour taped interview with Li, I draw the following conclusions:

1. Mr. Li and other political and educational leaders with whom the tour group spoke suffered mightily during the Cultural Revolution. Now, restored to positions of influence, they are openly contemptuous of that period of their history and its effects on their country.

2. There is abundant evidence of rapid change in many aspects of Chinese life. Professor Edelstein, chairman of the English department at the University of Hawaii-Manoa who taught for two years at Tianjin Normal University, attests to this change in a Malamalama article (Spring, 1984), noting that "China, <just like all other> countries with centralized authority, can change more rapidly than most Western societies when it wants to."[3] It is clear that even though its current governmental policies place severe limitations on individual freedom, firmly controlling the lives of the people, China welcomes communication with other countries and is promoting genuine social, economic, and educational progress.

3. Underlying the rapid changes—the race to catch up with the technological progress of the West—is a tenacious loyalty to many traditions of the distant past, traditions which survived even the decades-long onslaught of the Cultural Revolution, and persist today.

Notes

[1] J. Jeffery Auer is a retired professor of speech communication and university administrator at Indiana University, and past president of Speech Communicaton Association.

[2] Fox Butterfield, China:Alive in the Bitter Sea (Times Books. 1982). p.

[3] Arnold Edelstein, "Professor Says His Perspective of China Limited By Exposure," Malamalama, (Publication of Univ. of Hawaii Foundation. Spring, 1984).